BASIC FACTORS IN THE GROWTH OF MIND AND SELF, ANALYSIS AND RECONSTRUCTION OF G. H. MEAD'S THEORY

BY

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Student at University of Vienna, 1919-1922

Diplomas in Music from Akademie für Musik, Vienna, 1923, 1924

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PHILOSOPHY IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

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The purpose of the thesis of which this is the abstract is to offer a theory of the conditions basic to the rise of mind and self. The theory grew out of an examination of G. H. Mead's theory of the rise of mind and self, and is developed from a criticism of his writing. Mead's account is based upon the assumption that the factors basic to the rise of mind and self are social and coincide with the factors upon which the rise of language depends. Yet in the description of the rise of mind and self given by Mead a striking gap becomes apparent between the mechanism which generates language and a process of identification of the individual with his social and natural environment prerequisite for the development of the mature stages of the self. The writer tries to show that the resulting difficulties inherent in Mead's theory can be removed if the relation of individual and environment in general, rather than the specific relation of individual and society, is considered the matrix for the development of mind and self.

According to Mead the presupposition for the rise of mind is the existence of a social activity carried on by biologic individuals endowed with what he calls consciousness in the first sense of the term. This consciousness in the first sense of the term can be described as a direct awareness of sensations and perceptions, and is simply the response of the individual to the stimuli provided by the environment. Individuals endowed with this sort of consciousness regulate their social activities by means of non-significant gestures. A non-significant gesture is nothing but an initial phase of a prospective action which calls out a response in, and hence has the corresponding meaning for, the other individual implicated in the common activity, but which calls out no response in, and hence has no meaning for, the individual making it. Mind arises when the process of communication with non-significant gestures becomes transformed

into a process of communication with significant gestures. Two conditions must be satisfied if this transformation is to take place: the gesture which is used must affect the individual making the gesture, and moreover, must call out in the individual making the gesture the same response it calls out in the individual to whom it is addressed. Both of these conditions are satisfied by the use of vocal gestures in the social process of communication on the human level. The individual hears his own gestures in the same manner as other individuals hear them, and responds to them in the same manner as the other individuals respond; hence the meaning of the gesture becomes internalized, or absorbed into the behavior of the individual making the gesture. The individual becomes conscious (in what Mead calls the second sense of the term), or self-conscious, of the meaning of his gesture; the gesture itself becomes a significant, or language—, symbol. With the rise of self-consciousness the foundation for the development of mind is laid. Mind turns out to be a function of the relationship of individual and environment and is described in terms of an operation with significant symbols. Such operation with significant symbols is carried out in advance of the overt activity to which the symbols refer, and presupposes a physiological mechanism of delaying responses such as is provided by the human cortex which therefore is the physiological prerequisite for the rise of mind.

Simultaneously with mind the self arises. The self is distinguished from the body and mere sensations by the fact that it can be an object to itself. Accordingly the self arises when the individual is affected by itself in the same way as by an outside agent and thus actually does become an object to itself. Such a situation is given in the process of self-stimulation through the vocal gesture, and in the taking of the attitudes, or rôles, of other individuals involved in such self-stimulation that calls out in the individual the same response as in other individuals. The self-response in the attitude, or rôle, of other individuals, concomitant with the rise of language-communication and mind, or, as Mead calls it, the rôle-taking process, thus is to be recognized as the central mechanism responsible for the rise of the self. Since in this manner the rise of language, self-

consciousness, mind, and self are all dependent upon the rôle-taking process, it becomes particularly important to clarify Mead's conception of this process. Mead admits various degrees in the capacity of rôle-taking. The variability of the capacity of rôle-taking, however, is ascribed by Mead not to different degrees of an ability to assimilate experiences (Mead's rôle-taking is in no sense a process of imitation), but rather to differences in the physiological preformation of responses that are similar to the responses of other individuals. The principal difference between an act of rôle-taking and any other response lies in the self-stimulation which is presupposed by the rôle-taking. It follows that rôle-taking coincides strictly with the carrying out of a response which simply is identical in kind with the response of some other individual. It seems adequate to supplement this characterization of Mead's conception of rôle-taking by a preliminary discussion of the difficulties inherent in Mead's conception. First, the following must be noted: Since animals do use vocal gestures and since the organization of the cortex at least of the higher mammals is very similar to the organization of the human cortex, since, moreover, the rôle-taking prerequisite for the rise of self-consciousness is merely the identity of the self-response of an individual with the response of other individuals, there seems to be no sufficient explanation provided for the difference between the animal and the human level. In this connection it must be remarked that the difficulty could be overcome if the rôle-taking process were described in a manner which would acknowledge a process of assimilation of experiences, in other words, if it were described as a learning process rather than as based upon an accidental identity of responses, because in this case the rise of mind could be ascribed to a difference in learning capacity or achievement. Second, according to Mead's description the animal with the greatest number of fixed responses should be most capable of taking the rôle of the other. The opposite, however, is found true. Man, with the fewest fixed responses, is most capable of rôle-taking. Third, Mead's description of rôle-taking leaves insufficient, if any, room for the influence of the environment upon the development of the individual.

In his further account of the development of the self Mead proceeds as follows: Since the development of the self is dependent upon the rôle-taking mechanism the first step toward this development is constituted by the use of significant (vocal) gestures. Concomitantly with the physiological development of the individual an ever increasing number of rôles is taken, and the self accordingly broadened, until the final step in the development is achieved through the taking of the attitude of what Mead calls the generalized other, i.e., when the self-response elicited by the use of significant symbols becomes identical with the response of the total organized community involved in the social activity. In accordance with this account the outstanding characteristics of the self are: that it is essentially a cognitive phenomenon, since its development follows in the wake of the rise of self-consciousness and mind; that it is by nature multiple, since a person has as many selves as there are organized social groups to which the person belongs. Finally, the self is social, since it arises within, and is a reflection of, the on-going social activity in which the individual is involved.

The socal self, or 'me', the constitution of which has just been described, is complemented by the 'I' phase of the self. The 'I' is the readjustment of the individual to the self-response which constitutes the 'me.' Thus the development of the self in the sense of a process of self-realization results from the respective actions and reactions of the 'I' and 'me.' This process of self-realization is equally important for individual and society because it brings not only development to the individual but also reorganization to society. It naturally implies certain conflicts which generate the problem of ethical behavior, the solution of which consists in the integration of the individual into the social order. Such integration is possible because the assertion of the 'I' can take the form of functional differentiation. Moreover, the taking of the attitude of others which is the basis of the social self (the 'me') implies sympathetic emotion and is conducive of cooperation within the social organization. The integration of the individual into the social order is completed when a sort of fusion of the 'I' and the 'me' is reached which is illus-

trated in the religious attitude and in team work such as economic activity. The development of the self tends toward a type of personality which is capable of achieving the integration of the individual into the social order concomitantly with the reorganization of society. The leader type or genius must be acknowledged as the type of personality wherein this goal is reached.

II

Attention has already been called to the important position the conception of rôle-taking holds in Mead's theory. Moreover certain difficulties connected with the conception have been pointed out. When the origin of these difficulties is examined it is found that they all spring from the fact that in Mead's conception of rôle-taking merely a process of acting out rôles is acknowledged while a complementary and prerequisite phase of rôle-acquiring or rôle-learning seems to be neglected. On the other hand, if a phase of rôle-acquiring were assigned its due place in the process of mental development it could help explain not only the difference between the mental status of man and animals, but also why man with the fewest fixed responses is most capable of rôle-taking, and how the environment is able to influence the individual with regard to the rôles he is to perform. The origin of Mead's neglect of a phase of rôle-acquiring is found in his endeavor to lump together into one single process four distinct phases, viz., rôle-acquiring, rôle-performing, self-stimulation, and the use of vocal gestures. The reasons for this procedure may be found in both his behavioristic view-point and his social approach to the problem of the rise of mind. In conformity with the behavioristic view-point according to which the existence of a mental faculty of a substantive mind cannot be conceded, Mead shows his unwillingness to admit a mental process of acquiring rôles prior to the actual performing of the rôle, when he explains that the rôle-taking in the sense of a mere self-response is not comparable to the procedure of the actor. In addition to this he is strongly convinced that the rise of mind can be explained only if viewed as a social

phenomenon. With regard to the latter point the question presents itself for examination whereupon that conviction is based and what influence it might have exerted upon Mead's procedure. The critic of Mead's theory can not concede that Mead has been successful in showing the truly social nature of mind. For none of the basic elements upon which the rise of mind depends is genuinely socially conditioned (the term social refers here not to any partnership in general, but to a symbiotic community of living individuals). Neither is meaning social in the limited sense, to which reference has just been made, nor is direct consciousness (Mead's consciousness in the first sense of the term) social. Both are simply the response of the individual to the environment, but do not presuppose the existence of a social group. Moreover self-consciousness as defined by Mead is even less social than the former. For direct consciousness or meaning presuppose at least the existence of the environment in addition to the individual, while self-consciousness, being a self-response, presupposes, so to speak, merely the existence of the individual.

Hence Mead, in order to show that mind is a social phenomenon, had to support his assertion by giving evidence that the mechanism by which mind is generated requires the setting of social intercourse. It is in this sense that he emphasizes the dependence of self-stimulation upon the use of vocal gestures which originally are incidental phases in a social process of communication by means of non-significant gestures. Thus the question arises whether self-stimulation is really dependent upon the use of vocal gestures, and whether the latter argument can be used in favor of the claim that mind is a social phenomenon. In answer to these questions the following must be noted: According to Mead self-consciousness and language communication arise in the same process of self-stimulation by means of vocal gestures, since the individual hears his own vocal gestures and responds to them in the same manner as other individuals. Yet in this connection Mead neglects to acknowledge that language communication depends upon identity of stimulation, while self-consciousness depends merely upon

self-stimulation as such. It is to be readily granted that vocal gestures of all gestures are most apt to produce identity of stimulation and in this sense are prerequisite for the rise of language communication. However, even in the case of vocal gestures the identity of stimulation is practically never perfect, and the difference in stimulation may reach the point where certain vocal gestures or phases of vocal gestures to which other individuals respond, do not at all affect the individual using the gestures. Hence it must be concluded that in spite of the importance of vocal gestures for the development of language communication their use does not guarantee self-stimulation, and it becomes necessary to determine what the conditions are for a gesture to produce self-stimulation and whether in the light of these conditions the dependence of self-stimulation upon the use of vocal gestures is to be upheld. Since there is nothing in the nature of the vocal gesture as such which could be held responsible for the absence of a self-response (an initial phase of an activity becomes a gesture insofar as it elicits a response) the reason for the absence of a self-response must be sought in the psychological constitution of the individual using the gesture without being affected by it. It is characteristic for the life process that consciousness arises in connection with an obstacle encountered by the living activity; furthermore living activities are directed toward goals, and the directedness of the total activity toward a goal may be called attention. The field of attention covers that which the activity is driving at. Accordingly consciousness arises only in connection with elements of the activity covered by the field of attention. It must be assumed that lowly developed individuals pursue goals of a non-specific nature, as e.g., 'food.' Hence the details of the activity of securing food, such as accompanying, and originally undoubtedly merely incidental, vocal gestures, are not covered by the field of attention. Accordingly it must be presumed that the individual will be affected by the (positive or negative) result of his action of securing food before he can be affected by his accompanying vocal gesture. Since self-stimulation by an activity constitutes self-consciousness, the rise of self-con-

sciousness ought therefore not to depend upon the use of vocal gestures which originally are mere incidental phases in activities directed toward broader goals and which can become included in the field of attention only after the accumulation of considerable experience on the part of the individual.

It has been discussed that Mead's failure to distinguish a phase of rôle-acquiring from a phase of rôle-performing gives rise to serious difficulties. It has also been discussed that Mead's procedure of linking up rôle-taking, self-stimulation, the rise of self-consciousness and of language communication, with the use of vocal gestures, and his corresponding claim of the social nature of mind, cannot be accepted as satisfactorily founded. It remains to be seen whether the claim that Mead has failed to acknowledge a phase of rôle-acquiring can be supported by positive evidence that a due place can be assigned to such a phase in consistency with Mead's general behavioristic premises, and how the theory of the rise of self-consciousness could be reconstructed in consideration of the criticisms which have been raised against Mead's presentation.

III

The attempt to account for a phase of rôle-acquiring calls in the first place for a clarification of what such an attempt involves. Mead in his account of rôle-taking refers to the development of a certain predisposition of the individual for taking rôles consequent upon the individual's physiological development. But he neglects to give due space to an ability of rôle-learning. In other words, though he acknowledges a sort of passive process of rôle-maturation, he does not acknowledge a process of rôle-acquisition or assimiliation due to the creative, spontaneous activity of the individual himself. Mead's position seems closely connected with his acceptance of the doctrine of emergent evolution in accordance with which he believes mind to arise on the social level on account of certain factors through the accidental operation of which mind is, so to speak, imposed upon the individual. In view of these observations the problem, then, seems to be how the description of life in terms of emergent

evolution could be replaced by a description which acknowledges fully the self-creative, active participation of the individual in the development of mind and which correspondingly will permit the acknowledgement of an active, spontaneous phase of rôle-acquiring in the sense of an achievement of the individual.

The writer presumes that this problem can be solved if the life process is described in terms of a comprehensive growth process. An examination of the biologic conception of growth shows that the physico-chemical processes upon which the biologic growth process depends, do not possess any peculiar characteristic which would distinguish these processes from any other processes by which connections between physico-chemical elements are built up. Hence growth is simply to be determined in a broad sense as the process by which the living system, or individual, increases its size. The living system, in its turn, is not identical with protoplasm, nor with the organism proper. It is generally defined as a system consisting of various diversified parts which are mutually dependent in such a manner as to insure the carrying on of the life process by the total system. Since it can be shown that the mutual dependence presupposed by the definition is not dependent upon physical coherence, since, moreover, mutual dependence is the basic relationship prevailing between the organism and the so-called environment (the very existence of life presupposes this mutual dependence of organism and environment of which it is the expression), the living system must be recognized to comprise both, the organism and the environment. Growth accordingly must be defined as covering all the processes (including those by which the environment is brought within the functioning range of the living system), by which the total living system is built up. In order to distinguish this conception of growth from the traditional conceptions of true growth and organic growth used in biology the term 'organismal growth' is proposed. The relation of these three conceptions of growth is the following: 'true growth' designates the increase in mass of the protoplasmic substances which form part of the organism; 'organic growth' designates the increase in size of the organism which consists

of protoplasmic substances plus inorganic substances, but which itself is merely a part of the total living system; 'organismal growth' designates the increase in size of the total living system (or individual in the broad sense of the term). As suggested above, it is presumed that the life process can be described in terms of this comprehensive conception of organismal growth, or, in other words, that the characteristic manifestations of life are implied in the conception of organismal growth. Basically the organismal growth process is a process in the course of which the living system incorporates into its functioning range elements taken from the surrounding world. The organismal growth process thus appears as a process in the course of which elements that originally were responded to by the living system, are transformed into elements which are responded with. Actually it can be shown that this type of process implies all the principal characteristics of the life process, namely: development of size as well as of complexity of structure and functioning of the living system; reproduction or increase in number of living systems; and development of adaptability in selective physico-chemical reactions within living systems, from which follows the development of mentality. Moreover, since the conception of organismal growth implies a progress from lower to higher levels of development it eliminates the necessity of using the concept of emergent evolution. Finally, organismal growth is a consequence of the dynamic structure of the living system, and a description of life in terms of organismal growth gives therefore such recognition to the self-creative aspect of life as is prerequisite for the acknowledgement of a phase of rôle-acquiring as a creative achievement of the individual. In addition to the points just made it must be noted that the mentality implied in the organismal growth process is identical with what Mead calls consciousness in the first sense of the term. Both are simply the responses to stimuli, or in other words, they are constituted by the fact that the reactions of the living system toward external elements have the character of being selective and directive in such a manner as to determine the organized structure of the living system.

It is now possible to approach the question: what place can be assigned to a phase of rôle-acquiring in a life process described as an organismal growth process? The effect of the process of rôle-acquiring undoubtedly is the presence in the individual of new behavior patterns which are identical with, and/or form a behavioral unit with, the behavior pattern of animate or inanimate objects given in the individual's physical world. Accordingly the process of rôle-acquiring achieves the transformation of elements that were responded to, into elements the individual responds, or is able to respond, with. Rôle-acquiring is therefore nothing but a special type of those successive single organismal growth acts of which the total organismal growth process is composed.

In order to show how on the basis of the newly gained conceptions an account of the rise of self-consciousness can be given, a detailed characterization of the mental constitution of the individual on the biological level must be attempted. Mentality is implied in the fact that certain physico-chemical events are selectively directed in such a manner that the growth of the individual results. The mental, or psychological, aspect of living activities is therefore embodied in the formal relationship of the corresponding physical events, and these formal relationships in turn constitute the definitions of psychological terms. The following formal relationships are presupposed by an organismal growth act: There must be given a living system engaged in the growth process, and some outside material of such a nature that at a certain moment of time the interaction between the two can begin. The phases of which the ensuing growth process consists, are: the total response of the individual; the mutual adaptation of individual and new material; the merging of individual and new material (the consummation of the transformation of the element that has been responded to into an element that is responded with). With regard to the mutual adaptation of individual and material it must be remarked that broadly speaking two possibilities are to be distinguished. In the one case the living system remains practically unchanged, while the new material is radically re-

organized; in the other case, the new material remains essentially unaltered, while the living system 'adapts' itself to the same. Obviously, in the latter case the mental aspect, unobscured by a complicated physico-chemical process, is most conspicuous, and the respective fields of biology and psychology can be deliminated from one another on the basis of the distinction just made. Processes of rôle-acquiring belong of course to the second, specifically psychological type, where the individual adapts himself to the new element, and the subsequent discussion presupposes the recognition of this approach.

On the basis of the formal relationships listed above which are prerequisite for an organismal growth act, a number of psychological terms can be determined, namely: consciousness, or the response of the individual to the stimulus; the subconscious self, or the unity of the individual with regard to the sum total of all his responses; attention, or the unity of the individual with regard to the carrying out of a specific response; rôle-acquiring (learning), or a certain type of process of adaptation of individual and stimulus; within this latter process, insight, or the consummation of rôle-acquiring; finally, expectation, being the expression of the fact that the earlier phases of an activity imply its later phases. By means of the foregoing psychological terms a psychological description of the act of rôle-acquiring can be given which is the analogue to the organismal growth act described above. When the subconscious self of an individual responds to a stimulus, attention is centered upon the character of the stimulus. Subsequently, the individual adapts himself to the functioning of the stimulus until the formation of a behavior pattern is achieved which presupposes the operation, or behavior, of the stimulus. When this process of rôle-acquiring is consummated, i.e., when insight is reached, attention fades out and the operation of the new material becomes automatic. Concomitantly, the individual has acquired a new rôle, and the beginning of an activity which involves the subsequent participation of the new material calls out an expectation of that participation.

As regards the rise of self-consciousness it has already been

remarked that this depends upon self-responses of the individual. Therefore, self-consciousness is bound to arise where an adjustment of an activity takes place with reference to an expectation. Since the presence ef an expectation presupposes the acquisition of the corresponding rôle, self-consciousness can arise only where a learning process has been achieved; on the other hand it seems necessary to assume the presence of at least a rudimentary form of self-consciousness wherever behavior is adjusted in keeping with the results of a previous learning process.

The preceding account of the rise of self-consciousness may adequately be concluded by a few remarks with regard to the relation of reflective thinking to self-consciousness. Although self-conscious experiences are so to speak the stuff of which fullfledged thoughts are composed, thinking proper cannot be identified with the rudimentary forms of self-consciousness. The rudimentary forms of self-consciousness are those where activity, self-response and self-adjustment practically coincide temporally so that the self-conscious experience is swallowed up in the overt activity as in the semi (self) -conscious adjustments which take place in walking. The highest forms of self-consciousness, i.e., the forms where the 'mental' character of the experience is most conspicuous, are those where no overt action takes place, but where the innervation of an action arouses an expectation the response to which consists in the formation of an adjustive attitude or expectation. When finally these implicit attitudes and expectations are reduced to, or supplanted by, the use of language symbols, then thinking proper, or abstract thinking by means of significant symbols, is achieved. The presuppositions for this development are the existence of a process of social communication by means of vocal gestures, and an ability of attentive observation and concomitant ability of learning (or of building up a highly complex living system) definitely superior to the corresponding abilities of animals.

VITA

The writer, Hubert Kessler, was born in Purkersdorf, Austria, on May 18, 1898. He attended the Staatsgymnasium, VIII. Bezirk, Vienna, Austria (Matura 1916). From 1916-1918 he served in the Austrian army. He studied organ, composition and conducting at the Akademie fur Musik, Vienna, from 1918-1925, musicology and classics at the University of Vienna from 1919-1922, and graduated with high honors from the Akademie (diploma in organ 1923, in conducting 1924). He served as coach-accompanist at the Akademie from 1926-1930. In 1930 he was appointed as Instructor in Music at the School of Music, University of Illinois, and was promoted to the rank of Assistant-Professor in 1934. Since 1933 he has been doing graduate work at the Department of Philosophy, University of Illinois.